



# What You Should Know About Pandemic Flu

## Childcare, School and University Planning

### What is pandemic flu?

**Pandemic flu** refers to any novel flu strain to which humans have little or no natural immunity that causes a widespread outbreak. It is a viral respiratory illness spread easily from person to person and can cause global infection and devastating fatality.

**Seasonal flu** is a viral respiratory illness to which humans have some immunity. A few strains of A type and B type influenza viruses pop up each year and a different vaccine is developed annually.

**Avian flu** or **bird flu** refers to type A influenza H5N1 which occurs naturally among birds. Humans have no immunity to this strain. Currently, it is only easily spread by bird-to-human contact. This strain has gotten so much attention because of its virulence in humans and the potential for viruses to mutate. Experts fear it could genetically mutate to spread easily among people, sparking a pandemic.

### When will a pandemic hit?

It is unknown when the next influenza pandemic will occur. Its scope and magnitude is also impossible to predict. Pandemics have occurred in 1918, 1957 and 1968. Experts agree that the next pandemic is long overdue, but cannot predict when it will happen.

Experts are closely watching the spread of H5N1. If they observe that it has gone under a significant genetic mutation and is spreading easily among humans, a pandemic is likely. However, the avian flu H5N1 variant may not ever mutate. A different strain may emerge. This is simply another uncertainty about pandemic flu.

A pandemic will not be a sudden event. It will unfold over time. Public health officials will know if there is a novel, emerging flu strain that could cause widespread illness and will track it as it spreads.

### What about vaccines and antivirals?

It is difficult to predict what type of flu virus will cause a pandemic. An effective vaccine for a pandemic flu strain cannot be developed until it has already emerged and is efficiently spreading among humans. The development of such a vaccine may take months and the supply may be limited, thus cannot be relied upon to effectively combat a pandemic.

Antivirals are prescription drugs that are used to treat seasonal influenza. They may prevent infection or lessen the duration of symptoms of someone already infected. Experts are not sure whether antiviral medications like *Tamiflu* and *Relenza* will work against a pandemic flu strain. While the federal government is stockpiling these drugs, their effectiveness is not certain and the supply may still be limited.

### What is the expectation of childcare, schools and universities?

Childcare centers, schools, colleges and universities are all breeding grounds for infection. During a pandemic, closures would be encouraged in order to minimize the spread of infection. It is important that daycares, schools, colleges and universities are aware of their responsibilities during a pandemic to do what is in the best interest of the health of children, students and the community.

It will be important for these entities to carefully plan and prepare for a pandemic in order to minimize the impact on human life, resources and revenue. Listed are some helpful websites that will provide daycares, schools, colleges and universities with tools needed to begin planning for pandemic flu.

### Resources for Planning and Preparedness

#### Childcare

[http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/child\\_care.pdf](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/child_care.pdf)

[http://www.healthykids.us/chapters/sick\\_main.htm](http://www.healthykids.us/chapters/sick_main.htm)

<http://www.healthykids.us/cleanliness.htm>

#### Schools K-12

<http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/schoolchecklist.pdf>

[http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergency\\_plan/pandemic/planning-guide/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/lead/safety/emergency_plan/pandemic/planning-guide/index.html)

[http://www.cchealth.org/topics/pandemic\\_flu/school\\_action\\_kit/](http://www.cchealth.org/topics/pandemic_flu/school_action_kit/)

#### Colleges and Universities

[http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/colleges\\_universities.pdf](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/pdf/colleges_universities.pdf)

[http://www.acha.org/info\\_resources/pandemic\\_flu.cfm](http://www.acha.org/info_resources/pandemic_flu.cfm)

<http://www.ajg.com/portal/communities/community.asp?UserID=2&CommunityID=440>

### What is McLean County Health Department Doing?

McLean County Health Department and other county officials have drafted a response plan for pandemic flu. County officials are working closely with hospitals, emergency responders and local, regional and state officials in developing comprehensive response strategies to protect citizens in McLean County in the event of a pandemic.

“Residents of McLean County can rest assured that the Health Department, in collaboration with its partners, will engage in an ongoing effort to develop and exercise plans that, when called upon, will lead to a highly effective pandemic influenza response.”

-Bob Keller, Director  
McLean County Health Department

